

# Department of Human Services

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## KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

### Father charged in infant son's death

Thursday, August 3, 2006

**By Lynn Turner**

**ltturner@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8564**

The father of a Dowagiac infant who apparently drowned in a bathtub July 27 was to be arraigned today on manslaughter and child-abuse charges, the Cass County prosecutor said.

Matthew Lee Prickett, 26, of Dowagiac, was arrested Tuesday. Authorities charge that Prickett "was grossly negligent while responsible for monitoring and bathing his 9-month-old baby," according to a news release. He left his son, Matthew J. Prickett, unattended by an adult in the tub for several minutes, Fitz said.

The involuntary-manslaughter charge carries a sentence of up to 15 years in prison, and the second-degree child-abuse charges carries a penalty of up to a four years in prison. Both charges stem from the July 27 bathtub incident.

The father was in another room watching television and reading mail when the incident occurred, Fitz said.

Prickett took his son to a hospital, where the boy was pronounced dead, Fitz said. A preliminary autopsy report indicates the child drowned.

Prickett lived with the mother of his son and a 3-year-old daughter in Dowagiac, Fitz said. The girl was home at the time of the incident. The mother was at work.

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# Niles Daily Star

ONLINE EDITION

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Prickett charged for death of infant

*Thursday, August 3, 2006 10:45 AM EDT*

CASSOPOLIS - Cass County Prosecutor Victor Fitz and Dowagiac Police Chief Tom Atkinson announced Wednesday that involuntary manslaughter charges have been levied against Matthew Lee Prickett, 26, Dowagiac, for the death of his 9-month-old son Matthew James Prickett.

Prickett was arrested Tuesday evening by the Dowagiac Police Department and was in the Cass County Jail awaiting arraignment on the manslaughter charge as well as a lesser offense of second-degree child abuse.

The involuntary manslaughter charge indicates that on Thursday, July 27, the defendant was grossly negligent while responsible for monitoring and bathing his 9-month-old baby.

The incident took place at the defendant's 107 Sheldon St. residence.

A preliminary examination will be scheduled by Cass County Fourth District Court.

Involuntary manslaughter is punishable by 15 years in prison.

Second-degree child abuse carries a four-year penalty upon conviction.



## THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

### Mother accused of fatal beating fights charges

Defense lawyer says toddler's death is unexplained

Thursday, August 03, 2006

**BY AMALIE NASH**

**News Staff Reporter**

The attorney for an Ypsilanti Township mother accused of beating her 3-year-old daughter to death last month fought the allegations Wednesday, saying prosecutors rushed to judgment.

LaToya Joplin, 29, was scheduled for a preliminary hearing Wednesday on charges of open murder, felony murder and first-degree child abuse in the July 17 death of 3-year-old Kayla Joplin. The hearing was delayed until Aug. 9.

In the meantime, Ann Arbor attorney David Nacht has commissioned a second autopsy and is defending Joplin's character and mothering skills.

"This is an innocent woman," Nacht said. "The allegations and comments made about her have had a devastating impact on her and her family."

At Joplin's arraignment last month, police said they discovered a pattern of abuse against the toddler by Joplin. On the morning of July 17, paramedics were called to her home in the 500 block of Villa Drive at Dover Place Town Houses because Kayla was not breathing.

Washtenaw County Medical Examiner Bader Cassin ruled the death a homicide and said it resulted from multiple blunt force injuries.

Nacht said Wednesday that the cause of death is in dispute, and a second autopsy has been performed by renowned pathologist Werner Spitz. Nacht has not yet received the results.

But Nacht said Kayla's father, who was in the townhouse, performed CPR on her before help arrived. He said rough CPR performed by an untrained person would likely lead to the trauma noted in the official autopsy.

"We absolutely believe the signs of trauma can be explained," Nacht said. "What we have is an unexplained death."

Washtenaw County Chief Assistant Prosecutor Joseph Burke declined to comment on the investigation or Nacht's statements, saying the case will be tried in the courtroom. Sheriff's Cmdr. Dave Egeler also declined comment and said details that will substantially support the charges will come out at the preliminary hearing.

Nacht said Kayla's father and others in the apartment said the girl was acting fine that evening. Police said she suffered an injury at some point in the evening that resulted in internal bleeding. Investigators said they believed punching and hitting was involved, and the autopsy showed signs of past abuse.

Joplin was asked by police if she disciplined her daughter that night and said yes, Nacht said. Although he

declined to get into the events of that night, Nacht said she never engaged in more than a normal spanking.

"So many people have said she is a wonderful mother," said Nacht, who said he saw Joplin Tuesday evening. "We feel we need to set the record straight. This was horrific, and she is deeply upset and experiencing the normal grief that a mother has over the loss of her child."

Joplin, who works for a custodial service, has been jailed since her arrest the day her daughter died. Her 8-year-old son is with relatives, but Nacht said state social workers are attempting to deprive her of her parental rights.

Nacht said Joplin does not have a history of abuse involving either child, and that Kayla suffered childhood accidents like many children do.

"There was a rush to judgment," he said. "It was a terribly sad thing that a child died, and everyone wants a complete understanding of what happened."

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## Muskegon Chronicle

### Dad accused of abusing 7-week-old

Thursday, August 03, 2006

By Lisa Medendorp

CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

A 23-year-old Muskegon man has been charged with sticking his finger down the throat of his baby son and then squeezing his head in an effort to make him stop crying.

Cleveland Wilde, of 139 Monroe, was arraigned Monday in 60th District Court on charges of assault with intent to do great bodily harm less than murder and second-degree child abuse.

Muskegon police were dispatched to Hackley Hospital at 7:43 p.m. Sunday, where they found 11/2-month-old Dennis Wilde being treated for a throat injury. "The baby was bleeding from the throat," said Detective Capt. Mark Lewis.

The father had "held the baby's head in his hand and shoved his finger down his throat to try to make the baby stop crying," Lewis said.

After that didn't work, Lewis said the father "wrapped his fingers around the baby's head and squeezed the top of the baby's head."

That type of behavior could have been fatal to the baby, Lewis said.

The baby's mother, Charity Wilde, and grandmother brought the child to the hospital. "She had spoken to her husband and said he was upset and angry that Dennis would not stop crying," Lewis said. "He told his wife he put his finger down the baby's throat."

The infant was released from the hospital after treatment, according to a hospital official.

Lewis said Cleveland Wilde also made admissions to a detective, explaining that "he had a problem with anger."

Visiting Judge Richard J. Pasarella set bail at \$25,000 cash or surety and preliminary examination for Aug. 11.

The assault charge carries a possible 10-year prison sentence, while the maximum penalty for the child-abuse offense is four years.

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Article published Aug 3, 2006

## **Mom in shaken baby case sentenced**

A Rochester Hills woman was sentenced Tuesday to 8-15 years in prison after a jury found her guilty of abusing her adopted baby daughter.

Tracey Brosch was sentenced by Oakland County Circuit Court Judge Steven Andrews on one count of child abuse, a felony that carries a 15-year maximum penalty. She was arrested Nov. 15 after she took the unconscious 14-month-old girl to a doctor.

The baby suffered injuries blamed on being shaken, including paralysis, seizures and brain damage.

The child had been adopted in June 2005.

The parental rights of both Brosch and her husband were terminated pending the outcome of the case.

Detective John Neph of the Oakland County Sheriff's Office said Tuesday the child remains at a specialized foster-care facility equipped to deal with her injuries.

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Article published Aug 2, 2006

## Police say child abuse case was 'borderline torture'

By Darrell Clem  
Staff Writer

Their young bodies bear the gruesome scars of child abuse that police say was inflicted in a Westland home where they were supposed to be safe. Three boys, ages 12, 11 and 9, were blindfolded, tied to a basement pole and burned – sometimes with a screwdriver heated by a propane torch, other times with a hot glue gun, authorities said.

They were beaten with extension cords and belts, police Sgt. Steve Borisch said, calling the abuse “borderline torture.”

Vincent Garrison Grant, the 37-year-old man charged with abusing them, denies many of the allegations, but today he faces a court hearing that will determine whether he should stand trial. In his home on Barchester, near John Hix and Cherry Hill roads, Grant is accused of abusing his wife's 9-year-old son and her two nephews, who were placed in her care by state officials because their mother allegedly had a drug problem, Borisch said.

Authorities believe the abuse began in 2003 and came to the attention of Westland police this spring, when one of the boys didn't want to go home from Stevenson Middle School.

“He was afraid to go home because of the punishment he was going to get,” Borisch said.

Police have photographs that show scars on the boys' arms and legs.

“They've got a lot of scars,” Borisch said. “They say he heated a screwdriver with a propane torch and burned them on their arms and legs. They say he burned their private parts, too. And they say he burned them with a hot glue gun in the same places.”

Grant confessed to blindfolding the boys and tying them up as punishment for being “bad kids,” Borisch said, but the defendant denies most of the allegations.

“He said he may have accidentally burned one of them with a glue gun, but he says he didn't burn them with a screwdriver,” Borisch said.

When police executed a search warrant at Grant's home, they found a screwdriver with a scorched tip, a propane torch and glue guns, Borisch said.

The wife's son has been placed in his grandfather's care, and the other two boys are in foster care, according to police.

Lt. James Ridener, who has climbed the ranks from police officer to sergeant to lieutenant in charge of the Westland detective bureau, put things in perspective when asked if he has personally seen such a gruesome case of child abuse.

“I can't think of one,” he said.

Although the 9-year-old boy's mother lived in the house, she will not face prosecution along with Grant.

“She claimed that she told him to stop when she found out,” Borisch said.

The boys were taken from the home in May, but authorities continued an investigation that culminated last Friday with Grant being arraigned on three counts of second-degree child abuse and three counts of felonious assault.

Westland 18th District Magistrate Donald Vandersloot ordered him jailed in lieu of a \$100,000 cash bond and scheduled him for today's preliminary hearing, which will determine whether he should stand trial in Wayne County Circuit Court.

Not-guilty pleas have been entered in Grant's court file. If convicted, he could face penalties ranging up to four years in prison.

An attorney for Grant couldn't be reached. He has asked for a court-appointed attorney, 18th District Court administrator David Wiacek said, but as of Tuesday afternoon there was no lawyer listed in court records.

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Article published Aug 3, 2006

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The baby suffered injuries blamed on being shaken, including paralysis, seizures and brain damage.

The child had been adopted in June 2005.

The parental rights of both Brosch and her husband were terminated pending the outcome of the case.

Detective John Neph of the Oakland County Sheriff's Office said Tuesday the child remains at a specialized foster-care facility equipped to deal with her injuries.

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## Mom hits tree while kids are in back seat

Thursday, August 03, 2006

**By Scott Hagen**

**shagen@citpat.com -- 768-4929**

A woman who police say was drunk and driving her two toddlers crashed into a tree in Henrietta Township on Tuesday night.

The 21-year-old from Rives Junction will face one charge of drunken driving and two charges of child endangerment. Police are not releasing her name pending formal charges in District Court.

The mother was driving west on Coonhill Road about 7 p.m. She went through a stop sign at N. Meridian Road, rolled her black 1990 Buick Grand Sport and hit the tree, county Undersheriff Tom Finco said.

The children, ages 2 and 3, were not injured in the crash. They were riding in car seats in the back.

Finco said the woman had a blood-alcohol content of 0.13 percent, more than the legal limit of 0.08 percent. She sustained minor injuries and was taken to Foote Hospital.

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# Niles Daily Star

ONLINE EDITION

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Counselors arrested on sex charges

*Thursday, August 3, 2006 10:45 AM EDT*

CASSOPOLIS - Cass County Sheriff Joseph M. Underwood Jr. reports that his department is investigating criminal sexual conduct case at Camp Wagner, on Brownsville Street in Calvin Township.

On July 26, at 6:38 p.m., sheriff's deputies were dispatched to Camp Wagner at 19088 Brownsville St. CSC complaint.

Deputies were informed of an alleged incident that occurred between two counselors and four campers.

All subjects involved in this case are males.

The counselors were 17 and 18 years old, while the victims were all juveniles.

In this case the suspects and victims all had clothing on and the suspects were "disciplining" campers violations that occurred at the camp.

The suspects would "simulate" sex with their victims.

Suspects Jordan Elliott Barnes, 17, of Chicago, Ill., and Lyle Carter Simpson, 18, of Indianapolis, Ind., both arrested and charged with criminal sexual conduct in the second degree (forcible contact with act having a position of authority).

They have been arraigned in Fourth District Court and are being held on \$50,000 bond.

There is a preliminary examination of evidence scheduled in District Court this morning at 9.

This incident remains under investigation by the Cass County Sheriff's Office.



**ourMidland.com**  
from the Midland Daily News

08/03/2006

## **Family and Children's names new leader**

**Midland Daily News**

The director of programs and services at Family and Children's Service since 2000 will become the agency's chief executive officer Aug. 21.

Janine Ouderkirk will replace Bonnie McManus, who is retiring Aug. 18 after 20 years at the agency's helm.

Ouderkirk began working at FCS in 1997 as the family life education coordinator, offering group services to people of all ages. Before joining the staff at FCS, Ouderkirk worked 14 years as an office manager in the for-profit business sector.

Since joining FCS, Ouderkirk has built strong partnerships with many agencies, according to a news release.

Ouderkirk earned a master's degree in social work from Michigan State University, and a bachelor's degree in psychology with a double minor in sociology and family life and human sexuality from Central Michigan University. She has extensive post-graduate training in the areas of management and leadership. She is married to Paul Ouderkirk, is the mother of two children and a grandmother of three children. The Ouderkirks maintain a foster group home and, since 1995, they have provided a home to more than 50 girls aged 11 to 17.

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## KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

### Local leaders back tax for juvenile home

Thursday, August 3, 2006

#### Gazette Staff Reports

The push for approval of a millage to fund a new county Juvenile Home facility is picking up steam.

A number of Kalamazoo-area leaders were expected to announce their support of the tax during a news conference this morning.

Members of the Kalamazoo County Commission, the Kalamazoo City Commission, area law enforcement and county judges were expected to take part in the news conference at 9 a.m. on the steps of the Juvenile Home, 1424 Gull Road.

Kalamazoo County voters are being asked to support a 25-year bond when they vote in the primary election Tuesday.

For the owner of an average home in Kalamazoo County, with a market value of \$138,310 and with a taxable value of \$56,991, the tax increase would be about \$15 in 2007.

Plans are to build a new facility on county property behind the current home. The new building would have space to house up to 64 youths and provide space for treatment and rehabilitation.

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## Teen could face terrorism charges

'Frightening' evidence against Oxford boy, 16, includes bombs, napalm, map, prosecutor says.

**Jennifer Chambers / The Detroit News**

**PONTIAC --** Prosecutors want to file terrorism charges against a 16-year-old Oxford boy accused of amassing 16 homemade bombs, manufacturing napalm and stealing blueprints of his high school.

Based on new evidence from the Oakland County Sheriff's Office and the State Police, prosecutors expect to file new charges as early as next week against Joel Mason Thomas.

"The evidence is frightening," Assistant Oakland County Prosecutor Keri Middleditch told an Oakland County judge Wednesday during a hearing for Thomas.

The new information is based on evidence collected from the basement of Thomas' parents' home, where in May federal, county and local law enforcement officials said they recovered the assembled bombs, shotgun shell bombs, blueprints, a "napalm substance" and a computer flash drive that contained information and pictures of explosives and chemicals used to make explosive devices.

According to a court psychologist who testified Wednesday, Thomas freely admitted that in his family's basement he was building a shotgun, had canisters to release chlorine gas, had the ingredients to make mustard gas and had already made napalm, gunpowder, smoke bombs and grenades.

"He said he made the weapons for self-defense in case of an attack," said Dr. Bernard Gaulier, chief of the psychological clinic for family court.

So far, Thomas has been charged as a juvenile with arson for allegedly burning down a school maintenance garage and with two counts of breaking and entering.

Today, Oakland Family Court Judge Martha Anderson is expected to rule whether Thomas will be tried in juvenile or adult court.

Gaulier, who said Thomas has a chance at rehabilitation in juvenile court, said that Thomas asked several friends to become a part of a "team" which would participate in different "missions."

Thomas described himself as the "ringleader," Gaulier said.

"He wanted to get back at society as a whole. He wanted to take the things he wanted," Gaulier said.

That was the explanation for Thomas' decision to break into the Oxford Township library and later the school maintenance garage, from which he admitted stealing tools, two-way radios, a scanner, a digital camera and blueprints, according to authorities.

Thomas reportedly feared he had left his fingerprints on the stolen items and set the building on fire, causing \$25,000 in damage.

Guy C. Hubble, a sheriff's detective in Oxford, said Thomas was happy to tell the police exactly what he did.

"He was proud of what he was doing. It gave him confidence," Hubble said.

You can reach Jennifer Chambers at (248) 647-7402 or [jchambers@detnews.com](mailto:jchambers@detnews.com).



## Granholm touts plan for uninsured

Thursday, August 03, 2006

**BARRIE BARBER**

### THE SAGINAW NEWS

Corine Mitchner works in health care but has no health insurance.

She's one of the 1.1 million uninsured state residents whom Gov. Jennifer M. Granholm wants to receive coverage under her proposed MI First Health Care Plan.

The \$1 billion initiative could start in April, Granholm said Wednesday in Saginaw.

Mitchner attended a health care roundtable with Granholm that attracted two dozen medical executives and business, labor and community leaders to Covenant Medical Center, 700 Cooper, to explore ways to make health care more accessible and affordable.

"We know it's not working right now, so the question is what can we do to make it work," said the Democratic governor, who faces re-election.

"I don't want to be a nation where we beg for quarters in glass jars next to cash registers at Dunkin' Donuts."

It isn't just a case of business competitiveness in a global marketplace or a matter of consumer affordability. It's a moral question for the richest nation in the world, she said.

Granholm said she would use \$400 million in state funds earmarked for health care, tied to a hoped-for \$600 million federal grant, to cover the cost of MI First.

Mitchner, 52, quit a cleaning job with health benefits three years ago to care for her ailing mother at home. The daughter's sole source of income is monthly checks of a little more than \$300 to provide home health care to another person, the Saginaw woman said.

"For all of us who don't have any health care insurance at all, it's devastating," Mitchner said, "and the health care worker that's doing all the work, we get sick too."

One in four nursing home employees and two in five home health care workers don't have health insurance, said Tameshia A. Bridges, a senior health policy analyst for the Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute in Lansing.

Health insurance would stabilize a work force that typically earns \$7 to \$11 per hour, she said.

"Workers need to be healthful for work," Bridges said.

High health care costs have hurt the bottom line of Michigan auto manufacturers, the governor said. An example is Ontario surpassing the Great Lakes State for the first time in auto manufacturing.

Automobile makers "are going there for one reason and one reason alone, and that is health care," she said.

Canada has a government-sponsored universal health care program for its 30 million residents.

Covenant HealthCare estimates that 6 percent of 750,000 annual patient visits to its 26 locations in mid-Michigan are from the uninsured, said Spencer Maidlow, the medical group's chief executive officer.

Covenant passes that cost onto insurance carriers, which works out to about \$730 a year for every ratepayer, he said.

"Business does end up paying for those uninsured," Maidlow said.

To qualify for MI Health, applicants would have to earn no more than 200 percent of the poverty level -- or about \$40,000 for a family of four -- to have a "no frills" benefit package, said T.J. Bucholz, a state Department of Community Health spokesman.

The hope is to offer private market insurance at no cost, he said. Others would pay premiums according to a sliding scale.

"It's not going to be Cadillac coverage, but it will be a general program for individuals to have general health coverage," he said.

Benefits could cover outpatient, preventive, mental health and dental services.

State officials are reviewing health initiatives in other states to find a model, such as the often-touted Massachusetts health care plan. By next July, the initiative imposes an "individual mandate" requiring state residents who can afford it to buy private insurance on their own or obtain it through their employers.

The plan slaps a \$295-per-worker assessment on any business that doesn't offer health coverage. The money helps cover uninsured employees, and the plan also covers the poor.

Dennis M. Paradis, executive director of the Michigan Osteopathic Association in Okemos, cautioned the governor that a close examination of the Massachusetts plan calls into question whether it's financially sustainable.

"A great deal of concern has been raised about that," he said. v

Barrie Barber covers politics and government for The Saginaw News. You may reach him at 776-9725.

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## **Gov. Touts MI First**

MIRS, Wednesday, August 2, 2006

Today in Saginaw, Gov. Jennifer [GRANHOLM](#) touted her MI First Health Care Plan, which she claims would make affordable health care accessible to every Michigander.

"As I travel the state, I have heard so many people's stories, and regardless of age, income or hometown, the stories are all too common — people are struggling to find access to affordable health care," Granholm said. "My health care plan will make health care more affordable to every citizen in Michigan; by making health care affordable and accessible, we make it universal."

Under the MI First Health Care Plan individuals without insurance would have access to private sector insurance plans offered by a newly-created exchange that would administer the plan. Premium assistance would be provided on a sliding scale based on income.

Before the plan could be implemented a federal Medicaid waiver would be required to provide Michigan with the flexibility to redirect existing state resources and new federal dollars.



August 3, 2006

# Scaling Back Changes to Medicare Payments

By **ROBERT PEAR**

WASHINGTON, Aug. 2 — Under intense pressure from health care lobbyists and lawmakers, the Bush administration says it will scale back and delay proposed changes in Medicare payments to hospitals that would have created clear winners and losers.

The proposals would have cut payments by 20 percent to 30 percent for many complex treatments and new technologies. Hospitals will instead see much smaller cuts or even small increases for many of those procedures. Some of the changes will be phased in over three years.

Doctors, hospitals, consumer groups and members of Congress had said the proposed cuts would be devastating. Under the proposals, they said, patients would have had less access to some services like cardiac care.

On Tuesday night, the Bush administration issued a final rule that reaffirmed the overall goal of more accurate payments while backing away from many of the proposed changes, including a sweeping revision in the classification of patients intended to account for the severity of their illnesses.

The reaction from Wall Street analysts on Wednesday was positive.

“The final rule significantly moderates proposed cuts for cardiac procedures,” Citigroup said in a note to investors. Lehman Brothers described the final rule as “a win for cardiac and orthopedic device companies, specialty hospitals and general acute care hospitals.” The Prudential Equity Group said the final rule, which takes effect on Oct. 1, was “favorable for device manufacturers” like Boston Scientific, Medtronic and St. Jude Medical.

Stephen J. Ubl, president of the Advanced Medical Technology Association, which

represents hundreds of device makers, said he was pleased that the Bush administration and Medicare officials had responded to the industry's concerns.

The new rule removes "a dark cloud" that had been hovering over the industry, Mr. Uhl said, adding, "The worst is behind us."

The industry's lobbying campaign offers a case study in how to influence the government on complex technical issues that have implications worth billions of dollars to a politically potent sector of the economy.

Rather than just filing comments on the proposed rule, the health care industry mobilized a political campaign that combined advertising and lobbying to beat back the proposed cuts. Lobbyists wrote dozens of letters to the Medicare agency, stoked concern on Capitol Hill, ran advertisements and met with White House officials including Rob Portman, the new director of the [Office of Management and Budget](#).

Under the proposal, published in April, the basic Medicare payment for surgery to open clogged arteries, by inserting a drug-coated wire mesh stent, would have been cut by 33 percent, to \$7,590. The final rule calls instead for a cut of 3 percent, so Medicare will pay about \$11,000.

The payment for implanting a [defibrillator](#), like the one used by Vice President [Dick Cheney](#), would have been cut 23 percent under the proposal, to \$22,000. The final rule calls for a cut of 2 percent, so Medicare will pay about \$27,750.

Under the final rule, hospitals will receive much smaller increases than originally proposed for treating some conditions, like pneumonia and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

[Michael O. Leavitt](#), the secretary of health and human services, said the current payment system was full of biases and distortions that encouraged hospitals to provide "treatments that happen to be the most profitable."

Federal officials said the new payments would be more accurate because they would be based on estimated hospital costs, rather than inflated charges. In revising its proposal, the government significantly modified its method of estimating costs, to include more data from high-cost hospitals. The resulting changes will be smaller than originally proposed and will be put into effect gradually over three years, rather than all at once.

Dr. [Mark B. McClellan](#), administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, said the final rule would mean “smaller changes in payment, up or down, than the proposed rule.”

Medicare pays more than \$125 billion a year to nearly 5,000 hospitals. Hospitals typically receive a fixed amount for each Medicare patient, regardless of how long the person stays in the hospital. Each patient is classified in one of 526 categories, known as diagnosis-related groups.

Federal officials had proposed sweeping changes in the classification system, to account for the severity of each patient’s illness. They wanted to replace the 526 categories with 861. They settled for more modest changes in 2007, creating 20 diagnostic groups and altering 32 others.

The severity of a patient’s illness can have a significant effect on the costs of care. In trying to account for those costs, the proposed rule relied heavily on a patient-classification system devised by 3M, the technology company based in Minnesota.

Hospitals said Medicare should not rely on a proprietary system controlled by a single company.

The Bush administration agreed to consider alternatives, to ensure that no company would have a monopoly over the software needed to manage billing and payment.

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# House Committee on Ways and Means

## Statement of Ikeita Cantu Hinojosa, Associate Counsel, Legislative Affairs, National Association of Social Workers

### Testimony Before the Subcommittee on Human Resources of the House Committee on Ways and Means

NASW News. [www.socialworkers.org](http://www.socialworkers.org) July 2006

Chairman Herger and other distinguished members of the Committee on Ways and Means, we thank you for considering our statement as you prepare to reauthorize the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program.

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is the largest membership organization of professional social workers in the world, with over 150,000 members. NASW works to enhance the professional growth and development of its members, to create and maintain standards for the profession, and to advance sound social policies. NASW also contributes to the well-being of individuals, families, and communities through its work and advocacy.

Social work is the largest and most important social service profession in the United States. Social workers help people function better in their environments, improve their relationships with others, and solve personal and family problems through individual, social, and psychological counseling and support.

The most commonly reported practice areas of licensed social workers are mental health (37%), child welfare/family (13%) and health (13%).<sup>[1]</sup> Social workers also work with older adults, adolescents, in schools, and in various other settings and populations.

Ninety-one percent of NASW members hold master's degrees in social work and 92 percent maintain some type of license, certification, or registration in their state; 70,000 also hold advanced credentials from NASW.

#### Overview

The social work profession has a long tradition of involvement with the child welfare system and welcomes the opportunity to participate in the process of reauthorizing the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program (PSSF). The program, formerly the Family Preservation and Support Services Program, is an important flexible funding source for an array of services for families with children. We recognize the importance of this program given that in 2003, an estimated 2.9 million cases of child abuse and neglect were reported and referred for investigation to state and local child protective service agencies because family members, professionals, or other citizens were concerned about their safety and well-being. After follow-up assessments, officials were able to substantiate 906,000 of these cases.<sup>[2]</sup> The program is also a critical component for reaching the goals of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA). It helps build capacity in states and communities so that services are available for children and families.

#### Background on the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program

The PSSF program was created in 1993 and originally named the Family Preservation and Support Services Program. At that time, all funding was guaranteed or mandatory. PSSF was reauthorized in 1997 and renamed the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program. Prior to this, at least 90% of the funds were used for family preservation and community-based family support services. The 1997 reauthorization added two additional service categories: time-limited reunification services and adoption promotion and support services to the existing family preservation and family support services. The Deficit Reduction Omnibus Reconciliation Act of

2005, passed in February 2006, provides a one-year (FY 2006) increase in mandatory, or guaranteed, funding for PSSF, bringing the mandatory funding up to \$345 million from the current level of \$305 million.

In addition to the mandatory funds guaranteed for PSSF annually, Congress also has the ability to approve up to \$200 million each year in additional discretionary funds. In FY 2006, Congress approved \$89.1 million in discretionary PSSF funds, a decrease of nearly \$9 million from the FY 2005 level – far short of the \$200 million that Congress could have approved. Therefore, the net increase for PSSF funding in FY 2006 will be slightly less than \$30 million, bringing total funding (mandatory and discretionary) for the program from \$403 million in FY 2005 to \$434 million in FY 2006.

The bill also amends the current Court Improvement Project (currently funded as a set-aside of regular PSSF funds), which provides grants to states' highest courts to use to assess and improve their child welfare proceedings. The bill provides additional funding for two new grant programs – each funded at \$10 million annually – aimed at strengthening the performance of courts on behalf of children who have been abused and neglected, including those in foster care and those waiting to be adopted.

PSSF funds are used to provide time-limited reunification services to address the needs of children and families who are involved in the foster care system. Services are provided within 15 months after the child enters foster care. Reunification services for the child and family include counseling, substance abuse treatment, mental health services, assistance to address domestic violence issues, temporary child care, and transportation services. Social workers serve children and families in many of these capacities.

Funds are allocated to states according to their relative shares of children receiving food stamps, subject to a 25% non-federal match. From annual mandatory funds, \$6 million is provided for research, evaluation, and technical assistance to identify and expand on programs proven effective. The State Court Improvement Program receives an initial allocation of \$10 million annually, with additional funds provided if Congress allocates funds in addition to the \$305 million in mandatory funds. The law emphasizes the importance of using court improvements to promote the Adoption and Safe Families Act's goals of safety, permanence, and well-being.

In addition to this reserved funding, if Congress opts to do so, the program could provide additional discretionary funds such as 3.3% for research, training, and evaluation; another 3.3% of discretionary funds could be available for state court improvement programs; and 2% of discretionary funds could be reserved for tribal governments.

Chairman Herger, we completely agree with your statement in the May 12 Committee's press release that "It is important that we do all we can to help families receive services to prevent child abuse and neglect." Further, we are pleased about the additional \$40 million for the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program included in the House draft bill. The bill allows for the use of funds to enhance caseworker visitation with foster care children, especially in the home. We know that increased client contact will yield better outcomes. However, we do caution that one of the challenges we hear from our workers that strive for more visitation is the mounting administrative burden imposed by the federal and state governments. Of course we know that data is critical to informing and improving outcomes, but these processes can drain time from worker visits. Agencies need access to technology to remain current with these systems and to reduce administrative time. That is why we are very pleased that funds can be used to improve "caseworker retention, recruitment, training, and ability to access the benefits of technology."

Child welfare positions are particularly demanding and stressful, often involving unreasonable workloads and low pay in comparison to jobs in other sectors that require comparable amounts of education and responsibility. Consequently, it becomes difficult to attract and retain the most qualified employees – those with professional training and experience. We hope to work with

Congress to identify solutions to these complex problems and we offer the following recommendations:

### **Improve Education and Training Opportunities for Frontline Workers**

The public has high expectations for the child welfare system, as it should. Everyday, these agencies make life and death decisions for children and families with complex needs, striving to meet extensive legal mandates. We know that proper staff training is a critical component of this system. A number of studies have documented the critical connections between training, competency, and quality services.

A report in the Journal of Education for Social Work found that workers with social work education were more effective in service delivery than workers with a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree or other graduate degrees.<sup>[3]</sup> The connection of workforce quality to family outcomes was further documented in a March 2003 report by the U.S. General Accounting Office which states, “A stable and highly skilled child welfare workforce is necessary to effectively provide child welfare services that meet federal goals. [However,] large caseloads and worker turnover delay the timeliness of investigation and limit the frequency of worker visits with children, hampering agencies’ attainment of some key federal safety and permanency outcomes”.<sup>[4]</sup> The issue of high caseloads will be addressed later in this document.

It has been shown that a well prepared staff is more likely to remain in the field of child welfare, thus reducing worker turnover and increasing continuity of services with the family. Some social workers are able to take advantage of Federal assistance through the Title IV-E and Title IV-B programs of the Social Security Act. These funds are used to upgrade the skills and qualifications of child welfare workers through their participation in training programs specifically focused on child welfare practice. While these programs serve a useful purpose and must be preserved, we know that these two programs alone cannot support the entire field of child welfare workers. Specific recommendations to enhance Title IV-B and E will follow.

A new national study from NASW, “Assuring the Sufficiency of a Frontline Workforce: A National Study of Licensed Social Workers,” shines a bright light on issues related to workforce retention.<sup>[5]</sup> The study warns of an impending shortage of social workers that threatens future services for all Americans, especially the most vulnerable among us, children and older adults.

Key findings include:

- The supply of licensed social workers is insufficient to meet the needs of organizations serving children and families;
- Workload expansion plus fewer resources impedes social worker retention; and
- Agencies struggle to fill social work vacancies.

**Recommendation:** Congress should provide the 3.3% in discretionary funds to allow for research, training, and evaluation of services in the child welfare system. Also, greater investments are needed to provide social workers with professional development preparation and ongoing training opportunities, particularly in the area of cultural competence. We believe that valuable employment incentives, including pay increases, benefits, student loan forgiveness, and promotional opportunities are essential for the development of a highly skilled human services workforce.

### **Strengthen the Cultural Competence of the Child Welfare Workforce to Improve Outcomes for Children**

Nationally, and in most states, children of color, especially African American children, are overrepresented in the system. Although African American children constitute 15% of the U.S. child population, they represent 34% of all children in foster care. White children, by contrast, represent 61% of the U.S. child population but 40% of children in foster care.<sup>[6]</sup> This disproportionate representation continues despite research indicating that there are no differences in the incidence of child abuse and neglect by racial or ethnic groups.



The child welfare workforce plays a critical role in ensuring that children and families of color receive quality services and that appropriate decisions are made to ensure the safety, well-being, and permanency of children. It is largely caseworkers and supervisors who make decisions regarding the placement of children in foster care and permanency outcomes for children. At each decision point, culturally appropriate action or inaction can profoundly influence the trajectory of a child's life. Social workers in child welfare are expected to be knowledgeable about cultural competency practices and standards as described in the NASW Standards for Cultural Competence (2001).<sup>[7]</sup>

The child welfare workforce has a thirst and a need for cultural competence training. There are many workers that lack cross-cultural communication skills because of infrequent interaction with other cultures. Therefore, the importance of having workers that reflect the community they serve cannot be overstated. We know from our workforce study that social workers' young clients and their families face an array of challenges. These youths are more likely to be children of color and to come from environments that are plagued by socioeconomic disadvantages. Meanwhile, there exists a shortage of social workers of color to serve these families. In racial and ethnic diversity terms, the social work profession has not kept pace with the general population trends because of its inability to attract workers of color, resulting in a workforce that is not as diverse as the population they serve.<sup>[8]</sup>

The aforementioned 2005 NASW workforce study of licensed social workers states that 89% of social workers desire additional training.<sup>[9]</sup> Further, social workers in agencies in the public sector (which employs the greatest number of new social workers) were more likely to report limited training opportunities for new workers. It is critical that social workers in child welfare receive adequate training early in their careers and on an ongoing basis. Public policies must support agencies' ability to offer their staff additional training in cultural competence.

**Recommendation:** Given the demographic trends of children of color in the child welfare system, the need for more workers of color, and the need for child welfare worker training, particularly in cultural competence, we suggest that each state participating in the Title IV-B and Title IV-E programs include within their federally approved plan:

- Guidelines for developing and/or strengthening the cultural competence of child welfare staff;
- Specific steps that the state will take to identify the extent to which racial disproportionality exists at key decision-making points, if any (to include the following: substantiation of reports of child maltreatment, decisions to place children in foster care, decisions to seek termination of parental rights, and terminating parental rights and freeing children for adoption);
- A plan for addressing disproportionality at key decision points, when identified;
- Increased resources to enable social workers to enhance the recruitment and retention of potential foster families and adoptive parents consistent with the Multiethnic Placement Act; and
- Increased resources to enable child welfare administrators to hire culturally and linguistically appropriate staff to meet the needs of the community at competitive salary rates.

The state's implementation of these plan requirements could be assessed through the Child and Family Service Review.

### **Establish a National Caseload Size**

The Child Welfare League of America recommends a caseload ratio of 12 to 15 children per caseworker, and the Council on Accreditation recommends that caseloads not exceed 18 children per caseworker. However, a national survey found that caseloads for individual child welfare social workers range from 10 to 110, with workers handling on average 24 to 31



children, each double the recommended number.<sup>[10]</sup> As was noted, high caseloads lead to increased worker turnover and reduced service capacity.

**Recommendation:** We ask Congress to consider ways to establish a national caseload size. Federal policy incentives that encourage states and counties to improve their human services workforce by building a comprehensive and integrated continuum of services, fostering innovation in program design, and developing consistent leadership, are desperately needed. Federal statutes, policies, and funding streams can help make important and lasting improvements in the ability of social workers to meet the needs of the consumer. Methodologies for calculating average caseload sizes, taking into account state variations in the definitions and assignment of caseloads, could be developed by the Secretary of Health and Human Services in consultation with NASW and other national organizations. Benchmark measures could include: increased percentages of caseworkers and supervisors with BSW and MSW degrees, percentage reduction in caseworker turnover rates, and the development and adherence to a state plan that all supervisors in child welfare receive ongoing, consistent competency-based training on child welfare supervision and administration.

## Conclusion

Social workers are an integral part of the child welfare system as is the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program. For the system to be improved, adequate funding and supports for the program need to be made, and the program must be fully funded to its authorized level of \$505 million for FY 2007 through 2012. Also, social workers who care for children and families must receive adequate salaries, appropriate training, and manageable caseloads if the system is to be truly reformed. Further, states must make diligent efforts to reduce the disproportionality of children of color in the child welfare system.

We look forward to partnering with you on this important legislative initiative. To discuss any of these issues in detail, please contact me. Thank you for considering our input.

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[10] Alliance for Children and Families, American Public Human Services Association, Child Welfare League of America. (2001). "The child welfare workforce challenge: results from a preliminary study" presented at Finding Better Ways, 2001, Dallas, Texas.  
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# THE BAY CITY TIMES

## Drive set to help local rescue mission

Thursday, August 03, 2006

By **PATTI BRANDT**

**TIMES WRITER**

The Good Samaritan Rescue Mission is in need of provisions. Organizers of the Feed the Need food drive are hoping area residents will step up and donate.

Food is being collected today and Friday at six local branches of National City Bank - four in Bay City, one in Essexville and one in Pinconning.

The goal is to collect 600 pounds of food and \$600 in donations, said Dave Young, manager of National City's downtown Bay City branch. Monetary donations are tax deductible.

Items that are needed by the mission are canned vegetables, fruits and meats, fruit juices, boxed cereals and non-perishable items.

The food will benefit residents of the mission, at 713 Ninth St., and will be used to fill food baskets that the mission gives out to the hungry.

Chris Overlay, volunteer director for the mission, said food supplies are very low right now. The mission gives out about 50 food baskets per month, with each containing four or five meals.

People need to donate so that the mission can continue to help its neighbors, Overlay said.

"That's what we're doing, helping those in our neighborhood to get back on their feet," he said.

Young said this is the first time the mission has teamed up with National City for a food drive and, if it is successful, the drive could be an annual event.

And while the food drive goes on for just two days, the mission accepts donations of food, money, clothing and paper products - especially toilet paper and feminine hygiene products - between 8 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Right now, with the beginning of the school year coming up fast, Overlay said the mission could use backpacks, school supplies and healthy snacks that can be sent to school with children who are residing at the mission.

- Patti Brandt covers Bay County schools for The Times. She can be reached at 894-9673 or by e-mail at [pbrandt@bc-times.com](mailto:pbrandt@bc-times.com).

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Article published Aug 2, 2006

## Men getting pumped up for LACASA

By Kristofer Karol

DAILY PRESS & ARGUS

When he went to a Howell Area Chamber of Commerce meeting this week, Steve Schuknecht made sure to don a pair of women's white, tan and turquoise shoes.

"I had some khakis and a denim shirt, and everybody said they went real well," Schuknecht said.

Schuknecht, assistant general manager of the Tanger Outlet Center at Kensington Valley, was hoping to sway some of his fellow businessmen to participate in what is believed to be the Detroit-area's first "Walk a Mile in Her Shoes."

The event, set for Aug. 26, will feature men walking throughout the Howell Township outlet mall in women's shoes.

It's sponsored by LACASA, which helps survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse. In the past year, 868 calls were made to LACASA's crisis line.

"It's a cause that is probably near and dear and (has) affected somebody in our lives at some point, and we feel it's very important to help LACASA and their efforts throughout the county," Kim Dane, the outlet mall's general manager, said.

LACASA Development Director Julie Smith said the event is part of a growing international movement.

"It's making light of a not-at-all funny situation, and it gives men a chance to show their support," Smith said.

Smith encouraged men to bring their own shoes; however, she will have a limited supply of shoes handy.

For the men who really want to go all-out, there will be a "frou-frou" area where they can decorate their shoes to be extra-feminine.

While some people will be making their high-heels debut Aug. 26, others are pros. Undersheriff Mike Murphy donned a dress and heels for last month's LACASA-sponsored Twilight in the Garden event to promote the upcoming walk.

"I was the talk of the Twilight. I even painted my toenails," he said. "I looked good."

Murphy, who is also on the LACASA Board of Directors, is looking for a size-14 women's shoe. He makes no promise that he will keep his balance.

"I will tell ya, the shoes I wore the night of the Twilight, they were only a women's size 12. They weren't too bad on the grass, but on the pavement, they were rough," Murphy said. "I imagine there will be quite a few guys on the 26th stumbling a little bit. We can all do it for a mile."

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Article published Aug 3, 2006

No job's tougher than a single parent's

**John Grap**

*The Enquirer*

Who works harder than a single mother?

Jaimee Troskey starts her day working as a nursing assistant at the Wattles Park Family Practice center.

If that's not enough, she also works as a server at Ruby Tuesday restaurant in the Harper Village shopping center.

Those are just warm-up gigs for the 30-year-old single mother for when she returns to her home in Lakeview with her three children, Andrew, 8, and Paige Troskey, 5, and Amelia Shields, 2.

After a breakup with her boyfriend two years ago in October, she lost 86 pounds in 16 weeks. She says it wasn't a happy time and she lost the weight in an unhealthy way: She didn't eat.

Troskey originally is from Detroit, and her father worked at Selfridge Air National Guard Base. The family moved here in 1981, and she graduated from Harper Creek High School in 1994.

For almost 13 years she's been serving and bartending, at Pizzeria Uno in Maryland and at Applebee's restaurant in Battle Creek. "I enjoy being a server, I'm good at it," she says confidently. She started working at Ruby Tuesday in the spring.

In July she began work at Wattles Park Family Practice. She wants to enroll in Kellogg Community College's nursing program and, she adds, "By the time I'm 40, I want to be a nurse practitioner."

As a young girl, she volunteered at the Calhoun County Medical Care Facility. Her dream is to work at Borgess Medical Center in Kalamazoo.

Why there?

On Christmas Day in 2003, her children, Andrew and Paige, were in a car accident; her son suffered a ruptured spleen. She credits a nurse named Rick from Borgess who devoted all of his time to her son, working extra hours to care for him. From that point she decided she wanted to be a nurse.

Working and being a single mom is very tough. The other day her best friend, who also has three kids, told her she doesn't know how she does it.

She does go through phases when she thinks she's a bad mom because she doesn't spend more time with them.

But, she says, "The biggest thing I'll be able to tell my kids when they grow up is that I did it myself. I want to know it for me. And I want my kids to know it."

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